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Voluntary Public

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Costa Rica

Post: San Jose

Opposition to GMO corn in Costa Rica

Report Categories:

Biotechnology - GE Plants and Animals

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Report Highlights:

Several groups, including environmental, professional and academic, have increased opposition activities against granting of permits to grow genetically modified corn in Costa Rica. Although the corn would be grown for seed reproduction purposes and not for commercial production, environmental groups continue to put pressure on the technical commission in charge of the decision.

General Information:**Opposition to planting of GMO Corn grows in Costa Rica**

The National Bio-safety Commission is reviewing the Delta and Pine Corporation application to plant GMO corn for exporting the seeds. However, over the last few weeks several groups have expressed opposition to the plantation of GMO corn for seed re-exporting purposes by Delta and Pine Corporation (a subsidiary of Monsanto). Some of these groups include the Biology Department at the University of Costa Rica, the Association of Agronomists, and several environmental groups. Groups opposed to genetically modified corn argue that the transgenic varieties for which permission is being requested could interbreed with local corn, thereby affecting its characteristics. They also argue against the use of patented corn varieties and the higher price that producers may have to pay. However, they have not indicated publicly that the varieties in question are not going to be sold commercially in the country.

Transgenic soybeans and cotton, and to a lesser extent corn, have been grown in Costa Rica since 1991. The purpose of production has been seed reproduction and export of the seed, not local commercial production. In addition to the products mentioned above, field trials have been approved in Costa Rica for transgenic bananas and pineapples in the past five years.

The National Bio-safety Commission is in charge of analyzing and approving/rejecting requests to plant agricultural products derived from modern biotechnology. This Commission is mostly formed by scientists from government and academia, although two seats are allocated to environmental groups, which have clearly expressed non-scientific arguments in opposition to allowing corn to be planted. For instance, Fabian Pacheco, member of the Commission and a representative of ecological groups, has said that this issue cannot be solved from a purely technical point of view. He says that cultural and social aspects should also be analyzed during the process.

Minister of Agriculture Gloria Abraham said to the press that she trusts the Commission's decision and that the official position is to treat this issue strictly on a scientific basis and to avoid politics to get involved in the analysis of the issue.

A decision was scheduled to be made on December 3, 2012. However, the Commission decided to postpone the decision because two of the members requested additional information from the company. There is no specific deadline for the Commission to issue a report since that will depend on the time the company needs to provide the additional information requested. The Commission conducted hearings on December 4, 2012 with the participation of several individuals from the academic sector and environmental groups.